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# Undocumented Crime in Juan Mayorga's *Animales nocturnos*

## **Abstract**

The link between criminality and immigration is often personified in the undocumented immigrant. As nations have constricted the flow of immigrants, laws have inscribed a criminal culpability attached to the lack of documentation. The lack of papers becomes such a part of their persona that in Spanish the colloquial term for an undocumented immigrant is a *sin papeles* 'illegal immigrant.' Juan Mayorga's chilling 2003 play *Animales nocturnos* (*Nocturnal*) explores the lengths to which laws can be used to criminalize and psychologically abuse undocumented immigrants. This paper will explore how immigration law manifests itself in the play and how said manifestation establishes a Hegelian power dynamic between the autochthonous and immigrant protagonists of the play that results in the rewarding of criminal behavior. In order to demonstrate how the law leads to exploitation, textual analysis of Spain's immigration law will be juxtaposed to Hegel's master-slave dialectic. The juxtaposition will show that Spain's law does not give immigrants, regardless of status, the ability to fight against exploitation without putting themselves at risk of deportation, thus creating a catch-22 that enables autochthonous exploiters to take advantage of an immigrant's lack of legal residency status.

## **Keywords**

Juan Mayorga, *Animales nocturnos*, immigration, Hegel

## Undocumented Crime in Juan Mayorga's *Animales nocturnos*

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The link between criminality and immigration is often personified in the undocumented immigrant. As nations have constricted the flow of immigrants, laws have inscribed a criminal culpability attached to the lack of documentation. The lack of papers becomes such a part of their persona that in Spanish the colloquial term for an undocumented immigrant is a *sin papeles* 'without papers.' Juan Mayorga's chilling 2003 play *Animales nocturnos* (*Nocturnal*) explores the lengths to which laws can be used to criminalize and psychologically abuse undocumented immigrants. This paper will explore how immigration law manifests itself in the play and how this manifestation establishes a Hegelian power dynamic between the autochthonous and immigrant protagonists of the play that results in the rewarding of criminal behavior. In order to demonstrate how the law leads to exploitation, textual analysis of Spain's immigration law will be juxtaposed to Hegel's master-slave dialectic. The juxtaposition will show that Spain's law does not give immigrants, regardless of status, the ability to fight against exploitation without putting themselves at risk of deportation, thus creating a catch-22 that enables autochthonous exploiters to take advantage of an immigrant's lack of legal residency status.

In 1985, Spain drafted the *Ley Orgánica sobre los derechos y libertades de los extranjeros en España* 'Organic Law on the Rights and Freedoms of Foreigners in Spain' (commonly known as the *Ley de extranjería* 'Foreignness Law') as a stipulation to join what is now known as the European Union. The law granted a myriad of rights to immigrants, including the right to education, health care, housing, and more. In particular, it granted preferential treatment to "los iberoamericanos, portugueses, filipinos, andorranos, ecuatoguineanos, sefardíes y de los originarios de la ciudad de Gibraltar, por darse en ellos los supuestos de identidad o afinidad cultural, que les hacen acreedores a esta consideración" ("*Ley Orgánica 7/1985*" 20824) 'Iberoamericans, Portuguese, Filipinos, Andorrans, Equatoguineans, Sephardic Jews, and those from Gibraltar, for they possess the traces of identity or cultural affinity that make them worthy of this consideration.'<sup>1</sup> This clause was removed in the 1990s upon creation of the Schengen Zone as other Western European nations worried that such treatment would promote a flow of migrants from those nations into France and Germany, among others. As Kitty Calavita notes, "Despite much talk of coordinating policies at the EU level, most European immigration laws remain localized within the nation-state" (4). Throughout the 1990s, the ruling *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* 'Spanish Socialist Workers Party' government worked to decriminalize immigration and

even went so far as to run regularization programs in order to bring down the number of undocumented migrants in the nation. When the conservative Partido Popular came into power in the late 1990s, the shift towards criminalization had already begun as the national rhetoric blamed immigrants for stealing jobs and changing the economy. This shift led to the revision of the law in 2000 to limit the rights previously granted to immigrants regardless of their legal status.

The new law (*Ley Orgánica 8/2000*) served to firmly establish a policy in line with the Partido Popular's anti-immigration stance that would delineate not only the rights of foreigners in Spain, but also those of Spaniards in relation to foreigners. For example, in Article 9, "Todos los extranjeros menores de dieciocho años tienen derecho y deber a la educación en las mismas condiciones que los españoles, derecho que comprende el acceso a una enseñanza básica, gratuita y obligatoria, a la obtención de la titulación académica correspondiente y al acceso al sistema público de becas y ayudas" ("*Ley Orgánica 8/2000*" 45510) 'All foreigners under the age of eighteen have the right and the duty to the education in the same conditions as Spaniards, a right that is understood as the access to elementary, free, and obligatory education, to obtaining the corresponding academic title, and access to the public system of grants and aids.' However, after the age of 18, "[sólo] los extranjeros residentes tendrán derecho a la educación de naturaleza no obligatoria en las mismas condiciones que los españoles" ("*Ley Orgánica 8/2000*" 45510) '[only] foreign residents will have the right to non-obligatory education in the same conditions as Spaniards.' This slight change implies that only documented foreign residents would have the right to non-obligatory education. The law denies immigrants the rights to assemble, strike, and join labor unions (Articles 7, 8, 10, 11, 13 & 14). This hardline approach to immigrant rights was controversial in Spain because its aim to restrict immigration and stop the paths to legalization represented a large shift from the policies of the previous socialist PSOE government.

*Animales nocturnos* was derived from a shorter piece entitled *El buen vecino* ('The Good Neighbor' 2002), which Mayorga wrote in response to the controversial revision of the *Ley de extranjería* in 2000. After the success of *El buen vecino* in 2002, Mayorga developed this work into *Animales nocturnos*, which contains *El buen vecino* as Scene 1 and then nine additional scenes. *Animales nocturnos* is the story of two couples that live in the same apartment building, one autochthonous and the other immigrant, bonded by an act of blackmail. The four characters do not have proper names but are called Bajo, Baja, Alto and Alta 'Short Man,' 'Short Woman,' 'Tall Man,' and 'Tall Woman.' The shorter characters are locals, while the taller characters are immigrants. The lack of proper names serves "para conferirles mayor universalidad subrayando además, que la situación puede darse en cualquier país" (Abizanda Losada 149) 'to confer them with great universality underscoring in addition that the situation could take place in any

country.' It is precisely its universality that adds to the eeriness of the play's plotline, in that the possibility of such entrapment is not specific to Spain.

Claire Spooner notes that the play divides individuals into two categories, "ceux qui ont des papiers et ceux qui n'en ont pas, des hommes *dans la loi* et des hommes *hors la loi*" (emphasis in the original) 'those with papers and those without, men *within the law* and men *outside the law*.' The comparison made here is twofold because the relationship between Bajo and Alto can be seen from different perspectives. Alto is an outlaw for not having papers, whereas Bajo has them. On the other hand, Bajo is law-abiding with respect to his residency status, but his blackmail of Alto is unscrupulous and most certainly lawless. What ultimately binds the two men is the blackmail that establishes an interdependency that serves to demonstrate the extreme exploitation of immigrants in society today.

### The Master-Slave Dialectic

Exploitation can take various forms: physical, sexual, psychological, etc. In *Animales nocturnos*, exploitation subtly goes to an extreme, either slavery or animalization. The interactions of Bajo and Alto and their inherent criminality are a representation of the master-slave dialectic, a philosophical construct outlined in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This dialectic deconstructs the interdependency between the master and the slave, as one cannot exist without the other. One of the first steps of this dialectic is proving the existence of one's consciousness through the recognition of another person. Scene 1 begins in the local bar with a conversation regarding recognition:

HOMBRE BAJO. ¿Puedo sentarme con usted?

HOMBRE ALTO. Precisamente estaba a punto de pedir la cuenta.

BAJO. ¿No me reconoce? No me ha reconocido.

ALTO. ¿?

BAJO. Nos vemos todos los días.

ALTO. ¿¿?? (Mayorga, *Animales nocturnos* 177)

SHORT MAN. Do you mind if I sit down?

TALL MAN. I was just about to get the bill.

SHORT MAN. Do you not recognise me? You don't know who I am?

TALL MAN. ?

SHORT MAN. We see each other every day.

TALL MAN. ? (*Nocturnal*, Trans. David Johnston, 19)

This simple conversation establishes Bajo's manipulation: the act of recognition is one that establishes a target. Hegel states that "self-consciousness exists in itself

and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it *is* only by being acknowledged or ‘recognized’” (178, emphasis in original). The self cannot exist without the recognition of the Other, in this case, Alto. Bajo has premeditated intentions from the moment the conversation begins as he purposely approaches Alto. His need for recognition aids the establishment of his character and self-consciousness. As he invites Alto to a drink, Alto wishes to leave because he is unable to recognize Bajo. The lack of recognition by Alto, according to Hegel, renders Bajo a body without a spirit/mind. Bajo thus continues talking in an effort for Alto to recognize him. Upon obtaining recognition he persuades Alto to stay by inviting him to a glass of wine, even though Alto states that he does not drink alcohol. The conversation continues with Bajo rambling on about recognition, “Pero hasta hoy, no éramos más que dos sombras que se dicen “Buenos días” antes de volver a alejarse. Sin embargo, ahora estamos aquí, cara a cara, celebrando como si nos conociésemos de toda la vida” (179) ‘But until today, that’s what we were, two strangers who said good morning as they went about their business. And now look at us, sitting here, celebrating, as if we had known each other all our lives’ (20-21). The use of the word *sombras* ‘shadows’ here emphasizes a thematic thread that manifests itself throughout the play: the binary between day and night, light and darkness. The word also symbolizes the shadows in which undocumented immigrants live in order to survive in receptor nations.

Alto’s recognition of Bajo is thus a moment of Hegelian elucidation that allows for two states of consciousness to meet and establish their positions. Alto attempts to leave, but his curiosity (or manners) causes him to ask the cause of the celebration, to which Bajo responds, “[La ley] Tres siete cinco cuatro. La ley de inmigración” (180) ‘[Section] 3754. More commonly called the Immigration Act’ (22). The fact that the number (3754) does not match that of the actual law is irrelevant compared to the impact that this law has on the rest of the play’s trajectory. However, the change may also serve to represent that the situation occurring here could happen in any country. The translatability of the situation reflects the societal shift towards legal ensnarement of the immigrant. Once again, Alto is incapable of recognizing Bajo’s snare, so it must be broken down:

ALTO. No me había dado cuenta de que usted...

BAJO. No lo soy. No soy extranjero.

ALTO. ¿Entonces?

BAJO. Usted sí lo es. Extranjero.

ALTO. ¿Yo?

BAJO. No sé mucho de usted, pero eso sí lo sé, lo fundamental

ALTO. Ahora sí me va a disculpar. No quiero que se me haga tarde. (181)

TALL MAN. I didn’t realise you were . . .

SHORT MAN. I'm not. I'm not a foreigner.

TALL MAN. In that case?

SHORT MAN. But you are. A foreigner.

TALL MAN. Me?

SHORT MAN. I may know very little about you. But I do know that. The basics.

TALL MAN. Look, you really will have to excuse me. It's getting late. (22)

Alto incorrectly assumes that Bajo's celebration is in favor of the latter's immigrant rights when in fact he is celebrating the law's capacity to give him, as an autochthonous figure, power. The power dynamic is cemented once Bajo confirms that Alto is undocumented because his understanding of the law allows for his plan to succeed.

Bajo now has established his position as the master and explains his framework in a monologue:

En cuanto a esa ley, yo no la redacté. Pero, tan pronto como oí hablar de ella, supe que iba a cambiar mi vida. No se me ocurrió de buenas a primeras, fui madurándolo poco a poco, y hasta hoy no me he decidido a poner en práctica mi idea. Pero le repito que no tengo nada contra ustedes. Tampoco es nada personal, simplemente he pensado que debía concentrarme en un solo caso, y el suyo es el que conozco mejor. (181)

And I didn't make the law. But as soon as I heard about it, I knew it was going to change my life. Well, not straight away I didn't. But I thought about it and it was only today I decided to put my idea into practice. Listen, I'm serious, I've nothing against any of you. It's nothing personal. I just thought I should concentrate on one case, and yours is the one I know best. (22)

The decision to entrap an immigrant is something that Bajo had contemplated for quite some time, but Alto just happened to be the unlucky man who caused the elucidating moment that would allow Bajo to carry through with his plan. Later in the play, Bajo wonders if he should have picked someone else because of Alto's attempt to resist, which leads us to know that Bajo would have executed this plan one way or another.

Alto, on the defensive, attempts to prove that he is not an immigrant and regain an equilibrium in the power dynamic, but cannot comply with the inevitable request: "Muéstrémoslos. Sus papeles" (182) 'Then show them to me. Your papers' (23). Alto's unwillingness and incapacity to show his residency papers proves Bajo's theory right, "Hice algunas indagaciones, cualquiera puede hacerlas, basta tener un poco de tiempo, y yo lo tengo. Mi corazonada se confirmó: no tiene usted

papeles. Es un ‘sin papeles’” (182) ‘I made some enquires, anyone can, you just need to put a little bit of time into it. And I came up trumps. My hunch was right. You’ve no papers. You’re an illegal immigrant’ (23). Bajo’s bonanza of free time gave him the time necessary to dig for information on Alto in preparation for this conversation at the bar. Bajo then elaborates, explaining how the law has trapped Alto:

¿Qué va a hacer? ¿Ponerse a chillar delante de toda esta gente? ¿Llamar a la policía? ¿Por qué no la llama? Relájese, hombre. No le he llamado “hijodeputa”. Sólo he dicho que es un extranjero sin permiso de residencia. Nada grave, salvo que, en aplicación de la ley tres siete cinco cuatro, usted podría ser devuelto inmediatamente a su país de origen. ¿O es la ley tres cuatro siete cinco? (183)

What are you going to do? Start a row in front of everyone? Call the police? Go ahead. Relax. I haven’t tried to insult you. All I said was that you’re a foreigner, an illegal immigrant. No big deal, except that under Section 3754, you could be sent back home at once. Maybe it is 3475? (24)

According to Article 53 of the *Ley Orgánica*, this is a serious infraction: “Encontrarse irregularmente en territorio español, por no haber obtenido o tener caducada más de tres meses la prórroga de estancia, la autorización de residencia o documentos análogos, cuando fueren exigibles, y siempre que el interesado no hubiere solicitado la renovación de los mismos en el plazo previsto reglamentariamente” (“Ley Orgánica 8/2000” 45517) ‘To be found in Spanish territory without having obtained one’s residence permit or similar documents, or if these required documents have been expired for more than three months, provided that the interested party had not requested the renewal of these documents within the legally prescribed timeline.’ Alto’s mere presence in Spain makes him an outlaw. Furthermore, “Encontrarse trabajando en España sin haber obtenido permiso de trabajo o autorización administrativa previa para trabajar, cuando no cuente con autorización de residencia válida” (“Ley Orgánica 8/2000” 45517) ‘Finding yourself working in Spain without having obtained a work permit or prior administrative authorization to work, when you do not have valid residence authorization’ is a serious infraction of the Spanish immigration law. Alto should not be able to work without a work permit, but the proliferation of under-the-table jobs creates an underground economy that ultimately undermines the legal standing of the law. Such actions could result in hefty fines or, according to Article 57,

Cuando los infractores sean extranjeros y realicen conductas de las tipificadas como muy graves, o conductas graves de las previstas en los

apartados a, b, c, d y f del artículo 53 de esta Ley Orgánica, podrá aplicarse en lugar de la sanción de multa la expulsión del territorio español, previa la tramitación del correspondiente expediente administrativo. (“Ley Orgánica 8/2000” 45518)

When the offenders are foreigners and engage in conduct of those classified as very serious, or serious behaviors as provided in paragraphs a, b, c, d and f of Article 53 of this Organic Law, expulsion from Spanish territory may be applied instead of the penalty of a fine, pending the processing of the corresponding administrative file.

Bajo is correct in saying that Alto could be sent back to his home country given that his presence in the country without proper documentation would be a serious infraction of the law.

However, Article 54 states that “inducir, promover, favorecer o facilitar, formando parte de una organización con ánimo de lucro, la inmigración clandestina de personas en tránsito o con destino al territorio español” (“Ley Orgánica 8/2000” 45517) ‘to induce, promote, favor or facilitate, as part of a profit organization, the illegal immigration of people in transit to or headed for Spanish territory’ is a very serious infraction. That being said, since Bajo is aware of Alto’s undocumented status, he too is breaking the law by not reporting it to the authorities. Therefore, the blackmail is, despite Bajo’s expression otherwise, personal.

Bajo’s first explicit threat is made when Alto attempts to leave again:

Todavía no he bebido una gota. No me gusta beber solo. No vuelva a levantarse sin mi permiso, por favor, no me obligue a hacer lo que no quiero hacer. Estoy intentando ser amable. No es nada personal, ya se lo he dicho. Yo no redacté esa ley, pero ella ha cambiado nuestra relación. Dos sombras se cruzan cada mañana en la escalera hasta que un día . . . (183)

Not a drop. I don’t like drinking on my own. Please don’t stand up again without me telling you to, don’t make me do anything I don’t want to. I’m trying to be friendly. I told you, it’s nothing personal. I don’t make the law. But it has changed our relationship. Two shadows that pass on the stairs every morning until one day . . . (24)

The threat made here firmly established the hierarchy between the two protagonists as blackmail. The need for permission cements the master-slave dialectic as Scene 1 ends. Alto is indeed trapped because he cannot foil Bajo’s plan without revealing himself as an undocumented immigrant. Thus, in this vulnerable state Alto is trapped between a rock and a hard place.

Bajo's blackmail comes at a cost that will later prove to be more than Alto could ever afford: his humanity. In the quote that follows, Bajo outlines the terms and objectives of his blackmail:

No voy a obligarle a trabajar para mí, ni a cometer ninguna fechoría, no voy a ponerle la mano encima. Un día le pediré un rato de conversación; otro, que me acompañe a dar una vuelta. Nada feo, nada humillante. Que me lea un poema, que me cuente un chiste. . . . Nada humillante. A veces le pediré algo incómodo o desagradable, pero no con ánimo de ofenderlo, sino para comprobar su disponibilidad. Eso es, en definitiva, lo que me importa: estar seguro de su disponibilidad. Algunos días dejaré que se olvide de mí, pero siempre reapareceré. . . . Por otro lado, quizá usted consiga sus papeles algún día. Entretanto, vivamos. (184-85)

I'm not going to make you work for me or commit a crime or lay a finder on you. One day, I might ask for a bit of conversation, the next to go for a walk with me. Nothing terrible, nothing degrading. Get you to read me a poem, or tell me a joke. . . . Nothing degrading. Occasionally I'll ask you to do something uncomfortable, or unpleasant, not to offend you, just to make sure you're willing. That's about it, what matters: making sure you're willing. Some days I'll let you forget all about me, but I'll always come back . . . . And maybe one day you'll be made legal. In the meantime, let's get on with our lives. (25)

This detailed account of what Bajo considers as the terms of blackmail is highlighted by the repetition of the phrase "nothing degrading," but the power dynamic established by such blackmail is already humiliating. The almost omnipresent nature of his threat is an undocumented immigrant's worst nightmare: surveillance. There is no way to escape from Bajo's watch, especially considering that they live in the same building.

However, there are some factors that obscure the power structure presented. First of all, the characters' names, Bajo and Alto, would perhaps lead one to assume that Alto would be the autochthonous character and thus the one with power. Mayorga inverts that structure, which perhaps makes Bajo a more diabolic character as he goes against the grain of our unconscious expectations. Second, Bajo's use of the formal register (*usted* 'you') throughout this scene occurs for two reasons. First, the formal register is often used in cases in which two adults do not know each other. Second, it is used in respectful language. Throughout Scene 1, Bajo never changes to the informal (*tú* 'you') register despite the tone and sense of familiarity he employs.

The events that occur in Scene 1 are a clear reflection of a theme apparent in all of Mayorga's works. As he states:

Yo creo que hay un tema que vertebra mi obra. Es la indagación acerca de la violencia. . . . Entiendo por violencia la dominación de uno sobre otro o de una realidad sobre un ser humano, sea hombre o mujer. Me interesa poco la violencia explícita, o sea, física. . . . Me interesan otras formas de violencia que están en la vida cotidiana, que están permanentemente, por decirlo de algún modo, violando el mandato de "no matarás". (Gabriele 1097)

I believe that there is a theme that is the backbone of my work. It is the investigation of violence. . . . I understand violence as the domination of one over another or of a reality over a human being, be it man or woman. I'm not really interested in explicit violence, that is to say, physical violence. . . . I'm interested in other forms of violence that are present in daily life, that are permanently, to say it another way, violating the commandment of "thou shalt not kill."

The violence that we witness in *Animales nocturnos* is not physical violence. Instead, as Mayorga describes it, "La violencia es intentar matar a otro pero no a través de la muerte física sino a través de algo que pueda ser mucho más perverso, que es la muerte moral, la humillación, la aniquilación moral de algún ser humano" (Gabriele 1097) 'Violence is the intent to kill another but not through physical death, but rather through something that could be much more perverse, that is moral death, humiliation, moral annihilation of some human being.' Through the blackmail of Alto, Bajo is able to perform a kind of violence that is more dangerous and painful than physical violence, because "llega a machacar la identidad de una persona" (Gabriele 1097) 'it begins to crush the identity of a person.' This blackmail is such that it aims to destroy the core of Alto's agency, thus dehumanizing and animalizing him. In Hegelian terms, the master has complete control over his slave.

The two protagonists do not appear on stage together again until Scene 4, which takes place in the darkness of a zoo exhibit of nocturnal animals. This scene comes to define the title of the work. Bajo and Alto sit and observe the exhibit:

BAJO. Parecen inofensivos, ¿verdad? Pero en la oscuridad pueden ser muy peligrosos.  
(*Silencio.*)

BAJO. Me pregunto cómo nos ven ellos a nosotros. Imagínate que la gente se sentase a observar lo que haces, ¿cómo te sentirías? Eh, ¿cómo te sentirías? Te estoy preguntando.

ALTO. A éstos no es que los mire mucha gente. (203)

SHORT MAN. They look harmless, don't they? But in the dark they can be dangerous.

*Silence.*

SHORT MAN. I wonder what they make of us. Just imagine how you would feel if people sat down to watch what you're doing. How would you feel? I'm asking you.

TALL MAN. There aren't that many people who do watch them. (38)

The question posed by Bajo is interesting in that it can be applied directly to the situation of the two protagonists. The fact that Alto is nocturnal because he works at night leads him to be observed constantly by Bajo. Alto's answer is also in line with the situation because most people are not aware of those who work at night. Curiously, in this scene Bajo has changed to the informal register (*tú*) with Alto. It is unknown how much time has lapsed between Scenes 3 and 4, but one could infer that the change in register implies that this is not the first time Bajo and Alto have met since their initial interaction in Scene 1.

Another thing to note is that the characters are "sentados de cara al público" (203) 'seated facing the audience.' This stage direction implies that the audience members are the nocturnal animals of the exhibit. Given the rhetoric of Scene 4, this is important because it makes the spectator a suspicious being in the darkness whose eyes are fixed on the two male protagonists. At one point during their visit, Alto and Bajo see an owl and make some observations:

ALTO. Ese búho es enorme.

BAJO. No es un búho, es una lechuza. Parece que nos está mirando. ¿Nos estará mirando de verdad?

ALTO. Puede ser.

BAJO. Observa: me muevo y me sigue con los ojos. Camino y me sigue. Sí que nos está mirando. ¿Qué crees que estará pensando, de ti y de mí?

ALTO. Quién sabe.

BAJO. Seguro que se está haciendo preguntas acerca de nosotros. Me ha visto muchas veces solo. Y, de pronto, estoy aquí, contigo. (207)

TALL MAN. That owl's huge.

SHORT MAN. It's not an ordinary owl. It's a barn owl. It's as if he was looking at us. Do you think he is?

TALL MAN. Could be.

SHORT MAN. Look at me. I move and he follows me with his eyes. I walk and he follows me. What do you think he makes of us, you and me?

TALL MAN. Who knows?

SHORT MAN. He'll be wondering . . . he's seen me so many times on my own. And suddenly, here I am, with you? (42)

Bajo's observations could also be applied to the spectator who is developing questions about the relationship between Alto and Bajo as the play continues. This then could be extrapolated as a reflection of society's fear and suspicion of nocturnal animals (i.e., the unknown, that which we do not understand). Just as Bajo and Alto examine and question the presence of the animals in the exhibit, the animals (and the spectators) do the same.

Though Bajo speaks to Alto with a tone that is indicative of an owner and his pet, he kindly asks Alto, "¿Y yo? ¿Estoy siendo como tú esperabas? ¿Verdad que no estoy resultando tan malo? ¿Hay algo en lo que pueda ayudarte? ¿Qué tal en el trabajo? Cada día salen noticias de abusos terribles" (206) 'What about me? Am I like what you imagined? I'm not so bad, am I? Is there anything I can do for you? What about work? You hear terrible things about . . . discrimination' (41). Bajo's expression of concern for Alto's well-being here is indicative of his repetitive statement in Scene 1, "*nada humillante*" 'nothing degrading.' This also is reflective of Hegel's dialectic in that the relationship between the master and slave is an example of mutualistic dependency: there can be no master without the presence of a slave. Therefore, Bajo's questions serve to make sure that he is not in danger of losing his slave.

In Scene 7, Alto finally tells his wife about the perilous relationship he has with Bajo. Her reaction is for them to leave the city that very night. However, Alto is convinced that he can turn the tables somehow:

Él no me dejará ir. Lo tiene todo previsto. Ni siquiera matarlo sería una salida. La salida tiene que ser otra. La estoy buscando. Confía en mí. Sé lo que estoy haciendo. Recuerda a Sherezade. Cada vez que estoy con él, intento pensar en Sherezade. Se trata de salvar la cabeza cada día. Si algún día dejo de interesarle, ese día de verdad estaremos en peligro. Pero si me convierto en imprescindible, si consigo que me necesite, entonces estaremos seguros. Quizá tengamos algo más que seguridad. Sólo es un pobre idiota. Se corre si le citas a Kafka. Dame un poco de tiempo y lo verás comer en mi mano. (232)

He won't let me go. He's thought it all through. There wouldn't even be any point in killing him. It has to be some other sort of solution, and I'm looking

for it. Trust me. I know what I'm doing. Remember Sheherezade. Each time I'm with him, I try to think about Sheherezade. I'm taking it one day at a time. And if one day he loses interest in me, then we are really in danger. But if I become important to him, if I make him need me, then we're safe. We'll be more than safe. He's a poor fool. He almost comes if you quote Kafka at him. Give me a bit of time and I'll have him eating out of the palm of my hand. (62-63)

Alto, citing Sheherezade (the legendary storyteller of *One Thousand and One Nights*) reveals that his plan is to save himself and Alta by continuing to pique Bajo's interest. In doing so, he will establish himself as an essential piece of Bajo's life and thus be free to live in the country without problems. However, this statement plays into the Hegelian notion of the master and the slave because the two form a dependence upon each other that joins them permanently.

By the end of this dialogue, Alta is completely aware of the dynamic at play: "Ahora entiendo por qué su mujer tiene esa cara de vencida. Porque no puede competir. Ninguna mujer puede compararse a un esclavo. ¿Es eso lo que has elegido ser, su esclavo? Yo no voy a verlo. Contigo o sin ti, mañana cogeré un tren" (233) 'Now I understand why his wife looks so defeated. Because she can't compete. No woman could, with a slave. Is that what you've chosen to be, his slave? I can't stand by and watch that happen. I'm getting on a train tomorrow, whether you come or not' (63). She not only recognizes that her husband has become a slave but also understands why Baja always has a look of defeat. Baja's lack of communication with her husband is exacerbated by the presence of Alto. Alta's ultimatum at the end of this quote demonstrates that her marriage is not as stable as even she thought it was. In the previous scene, when Bajo comes to fix the breaker box, she tells him, "Cuando dos personas atraviesan dificultades y nada consigue separarlas, cualquier lugar es bueno. Cualquier lugar es bueno, con tal de seguir juntos" (223) 'When two people have stuck together through thick and thin, it doesn't matter where they live. Anywhere's good as long as you stick together' (55). In realizing the relationship that Bajo and Alto have, Alta notes that Bajo has succeeded in separating them and decides to act upon desires that she expresses earlier in the play, such as, "De pronto, me doy cuenta de que los hombres me miran" (192) 'I suddenly noticed men were looking at me' (30).

The play's final scene closes the possibility for Alto to ever escape his slavery, because Baja, made aware that her husband uses Alto to do the things on the "Lista de cosas que deseo hacer y que no puedo hacer con ella" (275) 'List of things I want to do that I can't do with her' (73), decides that she will use him for the same purpose. The final lines of the play demonstrate the development of this new relationship:

BAJO. Puedes irte. Hasta mañana.

*(El hombre alto va a irse. La voz de la mujer baja lo detiene.)*

BAJA. Quiero bailar.

*(Pausa.)*

BAJO. *(Al hombre alto.)* Ya has oído, ella quiere bailar. Ella ha estado pensando en ti últimamente. Puedes estar tranquilo. Sabes que yo nunca dejaré que nadie te haga daño. Ella no te pedirá nada feo, nada deshonesto, nada humillante. *(A la mujer baja.)* Si vais a poner música, por favor, no molestéis a los vecinos. (251)

SHORT MAN. You can go and rest. See you tomorrow.

*The TALL MAN makes to leave. He is stopped by the voice of the SHORT WOMAN.*

SHORT WOMAN. I want to dance.

*Pause.*

SHORT MAN. *(To the TALL MAN.)* You heard. She wants to dance. She's been thinking about you lately. But don't worry. You know I wouldn't let anybody hurt you. She won't ask for anything ugly, or degrading, nothing humiliating. *(To the SHORT WOMAN.)* If you're going to put music on, make sure it doesn't annoy the neighbours. (78)

This finale is an echo of the end of Scene 1, in which Bajo establishes the terms of his domination of Alto. Here much of the same rhetoric is used to submit Alto to the power of Baja. For example, in the antepenultimate sentence Bajo establishes that Alto is his possession and thus dancing with Baja is an order, not a request. In the following sentence, there is the repetition of the phrase *nada humillante* along with two other adjectives (*feo* 'ugly' and *deshonesto* 'degrading'), which mitigate Alto's desire to escape from the situation. However, being submitted to a second master is definitely humiliating and dehumanizing. The play ends with Alto about to catch her train to escape, indicative of the permanent loss of Alto's humanity.

## Conclusion

Juan Mayorga's *Animales nocturnos* delves into the extreme possibilities and dangers that immigrants face in Spain as a result of the *Ley de extranjería*. The play's use of this controversial law, along with the Hegelian power dynamics it develops, leaves the spectator with an eerie sense of discomfort and fear that men like Bajo exist. This is particularly true in the final stage directions, "*Feliz, relee su diario. Toca un botón y el tren nocturno se pone en marcha. La mujer baja pone sus manos sobre el hombre alto y le hace bailar. La mujer alta ve llegar su tren*" (251) 'Happily, he re-reads the opening sentences of his diary. He presses a switch

and the night-train starts up. The SHORT WOMAN puts her hands on the TALL MAN and makes him dance. The TALL WOMAN watches as her train pulls in' (79). The uncanny appearance of a female figurine holding a suitcase, which is thrown into Alto's glass of wine (the same wine he drank the day he spoke to Bajo in the bar Yakarta in Scene 1) and the turning on of the toy train just as Alta sees her train arrive give the impression that Bajo had planned everything all along. The eeriness of the play is only heightened by the scenography. In the 2005 staging of the play, the stage juts out into the audience like a runway, creating an enhanced sense of proximity to the spectators which serves to pull them in simultaneously as accomplices and victims of the blackmail.

The play conveys a sense of hopelessness with regard to the immigrants' situation. The law is so limiting that it is capable of enabling the premeditated enslavement that we witness in the play. There seems to be no way to stop the tragic ending because Alto himself plays into the slavery under which he is bound. Even Alta, though she is quite happy to be leaving, must undergo the process of uprooting and a new cultural negotiation wherever she ends up going. Her flight from the city is tragic in that she was not able to establish herself there as a result of the threat of Bajo's blackmail.

*Animales nocturnos* provides insight into Mayorga's initial reaction to the *Ley de extranjería* as a law that was seen as controversial for its treatment of foreigners. As Mayorga states, "Lo cierto es que, en ese arte político que es el teatro, el pensamiento que importa no es el del autor sino el del espectador. Las preguntas que el espectador pueda hacerse, el instinto de sospecha que en él se pueda desarrollar" ("Teatro y verdad" 160) 'What's certain is that, in the political art that is theater, the thought that matters is not the one of the author but rather the one of the spectator. The questions that the spectator can ask of themselves, the instinct of suspicion that can develop in him or her.' This being said, *Animales nocturnos* is set up in such a way that the spectator is forced to question and speculate how immigration policy affects both citizens and immigrants. There is no clear ideological slant in the play. It simply presents the situation and leaves the spectator to ask critical questions and develop their interpretations that will formulate their understanding of the law in question.

## Notes

1. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

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